The reception of Aristotelianism by medieval Jews differed widely from one community to another. Whereas it was rejected by the northern communities of Ashkenaz and Northern France, it was appropriated by the southern communities of Spain, Provence, and Italy; but the patterns of appropriation differed significantly among these three. For several years Gad Freudenthal has been dealing with the different patterns of reception of the “foreign wisdoms” in medieval Jewish communities. A recent volume he edited focuses on the Ashkenazi pattern. He has studied, first in general and then in greater detail, the very beginnings of the accommodation of secular knowledge in Provence; in two recent papers he compares the Provençal and the Italian patterns of cultural appropriation. But he refers only briefly to the Iberian Peninsula and concludes that “the matter calls for further research.” Hoping to contribute to his research, I offer here an initial, preliminary study of the Spanish pattern and compare it to the Provençal.

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4 Freudenthal, "Arabic and Latin Cultures," § 3.3.
Aristotelianism meant a more scientific “rationalist” perspective than rival philosophies. It also meant a more systematic study of texts, using the genre of the commentary. “Aristotelians were particularly devoted to crafting, fine-tuning and commenting upon their texts.”5 Throughout the Middle Ages Aristotelianism followed a more “scholastic” pattern than Neoplatonism, and Averroism was more scholastic than Avicennism. The scholastic orientation of Aristotelianism culminated in the universities in the Latin west. Jewish Aristotelianism began and ended in Spain. The first reception was in Muslim Spain in the second half of twelfth century; the last, in Christian Spain three centuries later.6 In between—in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—Aristotelianism was non-existent in Spain but thrived among the Jews in Provence and Italy, where its carriers were mainly Spanish Jews living outside Spain. The early and late Spanish episodes were quite different cultural phenomena: the early Aristotelians studied from Arabic sources and wrote mainly in Arabic; the later ones employed Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin sources and wrote mainly in Hebrew. Although referred to as “the autumn” or the “swan song” of medieval Jewish philosophy,7 it was, nevertheless, a lively and dynamic movement. The Jews turned with fresh interest and even enthusiasm to the study of Aristotle as well as Christian scholastic texts. Mauro Zonta designated this phenomenon “Hebrew Scholasticism” and noted that it “constituted a far more systematic phenomenon and appears to reflect a surprisingly extensive absorption of Christian culture” than before in medieval Jewish societies.8 Before turning to the story of Spanish-Jewish Aristotelianism let me address the more ordinary story of Provence.

6 A few reverberations continued in the sixteenth century in Italy and Byzantium. Puig refers to Eliah del-Medigo as the last Jewish Averroist.